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Ministry of Education

VERNON OPENS STRONGSTART BC EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

VERNON – Minister of Children and Family Development Tom Christensen joined Vernon school board chair Bill Turanski, district staff, parents and caregivers today for the official opening of the Province's StrongStart BC early learning centre at Harwood elementary.

"Our government is working with the school district and the community to help every preschool child start school ready to succeed," said Christensen. "This StrongStart BC centre will help parents support their preschoolers, providing them with every opportunity to enter kindergarten prepared and confident of success."

The Harwood StrongStart BC centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator leads activities, including stories, music, and art, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting.

Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart BC centres use the excess school space to deliver valuable early learning services. The Vernon school district is receiving $70,000 to operate the Harwood elementary StrongStart BC centre. This includes $40,000 to prepare its in-school space, including renovations and the purchase of equipment and fund this year's operating costs, including staff, supplies and healthy snacks. It also includes $30,000 for its second year of operation.

"More than 9,000 B.C. kindergarten students are not developmentally ready to start school," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "We need to make sure those students are better prepared. StrongStart BC early learning centres are part of our plan to improve literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible chances of success in school and life."

All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have been offered the opportunity to participate in the StrongStart BC program. The Province is providing a total of $5 million for up to 80 StrongStart BC centres as part ReadNow BC, the new provincial literacy plan.

"The Vernon school board believes the StrongStart BC program is a valuable enhancement to our district initiatives around early learning, literacy and parental involvement," said Bill Turanski, chair of the Vernon school board. "Children who experience an intellectually stimulating environment as preschoolers are often better prepared and experience more success when they enter the public school system."

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The StrongStart BC centres help the Province reach its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over $106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as $9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and $2.7 million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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